

The Twisty
Passages of Time
Veer Left for Home

K.D. Loveridge

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To my wife, Janna, and my kids, Megan, Bailey, and Jace. For putting up with over twenty years of me talking about this story, and for still being willing to call me a husband and father.

PROLOGUE



Alfred Quentin was born in 1871 in Norfolk, Virginia, to Belmont and Annie Quentin. When he was five years old, Alfred's mother died while giving birth to who would have been his baby sister. Sadly, both mother and baby died, leaving Alfred and his father alone in the world.

Belmont Quentin was a teacher, and after the loss of his beloved Annie he struggled for years. One day, on a whim, he

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declared to his teenage son they were going to California for the summer to do some gold mining. Thinking their adventure would only last the summer, they climbed aboard the westbound train with only the clothes on their backs. That was the last time they would see Virginia together again.

By the time Alfred was twenty-five, he and his father had built up a lucrative mining operation. Their mine, the Belle of the Pacific, was one of the last big mines in Northern California and it made Alfred and his father very wealthy.

Life was good. Until the tragic summer day in 1898 when Belmont Quentin was killed in a mine shaft collapse.

Alfred was devastated. Faced with grief, he traveled the country alone for more than a year. In his journal, Alfred recounted the following events.

Tuesday, October 10, 1899

By my estimation, I've traveled perhaps ten thousand miles in the last thirteen months. I've gone to every place my fancy desired—I've purged my soul of the sorrow and pains of Father's passing.

I returned to Norfolk for a spell. The old house had long since been torn down and my childhood chums had moved on. There was nothing left to warrant returning for good. I did relive a fond memory, however. I took a sloop on the Atlantic and sailed for a day. It was one of my favorite childhood memories with my father.

I spent the better part of four months working my way northwest by train, horse, and even automobile.

It wasn't until I reached an outlook of Homer, Alaska, that I found what I was looking for. Homer Pennock made a run at making a fortune at gold mining in the area. He moved on when his efforts fell short. I felt

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my happiness was not to be realized digging for gold and decided at that moment my mining days were over.

Looking up into those majestic mountains, I knew I needed to set my sights higher. I would follow in my father's footsteps as a teacher.

* * *

Thursday, October 12, 1899

Made my way down the coast past Vancouver. Hitched a ride with an old fishing buddy of mine, Herbert Henry. He was proud to demonstrate his new boat that ran off petrol. Call me old fashioned, but after that trip I preferred the old ways. That new-fangled engine broke down five miles from shore. I rigged up a makeshift sail out of my bedding bundle and we drifted into a quaint little town called Stonehelm at the northern end of Oregon. Repairs should just take a day. Probably do some camping on the last leg before heading home.

* * *

Friday, October 13, 1899

Life-changing. That's what it was.

Last night, I camped alone on the outskirts over the Stonehelm bluffs looking over the sea. Around 3 a.m., I awoke in my tent to the sound of a voice calling my name. I went out, thinking it was my friend Herbert but discovered I was alone.

A voice came from the sea. It said, as plain as a man standing next to me, "Alfred, Behold."

A vision opened. I watched the firmament change right before my eyes. The moon, stars, and sun raced across the sky, settling on the most

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beautiful sunset I ever saw. The sun reached the horizon like a great orb of fire plunging into the sea. In all my life, I never realized just how small I was in the face of my maker.

The voice came again.

“I have seen the afflictions of my people and have heard their cries. You shall deny yourself and in this place rebuild a mighty nation.”

My last recollection was lying on my back, staring into the stars . . .

CHAPTER 1

Hermit Cove



Exploring the dimly lit alley, Liam Fennly jumped with surprise when the zombie lunged from the shadows. Instinctively, he reached for his Glock pistol.

Click! Click!

Out of ammo, he retreated to pick a different weapon. He switched to his old standby, the meat grinder. Pushing the joystick forward, he ran at the slime-covered corpse while tapping out a combo on the D-pad. His warrior prince flew into the air and came crashing down on the zombie. A fountain

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of green tendrils splatted against the alley wall. The creature fell to its knees and disintegrated with a deep, terrifying roar.

At that exact moment, a delicate female voice began to sing. Liam had played the game all morning. This was something new. He hit the pause button and grinned when he realized it was his sister.

Liam's parent's both worked, and before his sister got a summer job, the two spent a lot of time together. Mariam had a talent for working with plants and was hired at a local nursery, leaving Liam home alone most days. She was home early, and he couldn't wait to show her how he'd learned to climb the old alder tree in the back yard without any help.

He came out of his bedroom and found her primping at the bathroom mirror. Holding back in the hall, he listened. Hearing her sing always made him feel good—even when she sang one of those puke-bag love songs like she was doing right now.

Mariam moved the mirror to catch Liam's reflection. "What'cha up to, little brother?"

"I heard you singing. You're home early."

"Yeah, I wasn't feeling well, so Mrs. Fonnesebeck sent me home."

Liam looked at the makeup and perfume on the counter. Scattered at Mariam's feet were different sets of clothes she had gone through to pick the outfit she wore now.

"I thought you said you were sick. You look like you're going on a date."

"Well, Mrs. Fonnesebeck thought I got a little heatstroke when we were rearranging her greenhouse. I was feeling dizzy,

so she had me lay down until I felt better. I told her I was fine, but she sent me home anyway.”

“Oh. Since you’re home, I wanted to show you how good I’m getting at climbing the tree. I can do it now without any help.”

“I’m sorry, bud,” Mariam said, brushing her hair. “Eric called. He’s picking me up to go see a matinee in a little bit. You’ll have to show me tomorrow.”

“He’s sure been coming around a lot lately.”

“I know, but I really like him. He’s got a brother about your age.”

“Ronny?” Liam said indignantly. “He’s only eight years old! I’m eleven.”

“You mean ten. You’re ten until your birthday tomorrow. *Then* you turn eleven.” She set her brush on the counter, picked up her lipstick, and dabbed at her lips. When she noticed Liam staring, she asked. “What’s the matter?”

He didn’t respond but only eyed Mariam’s brush with contempt. Ever since that Eric Pilner had started coming around, she had changed, and Liam didn’t like it. He wanted his old tomboy sister back—the one who climbed trees and built dams in the gutter with water from the garden hose. All this hairspray, nails, and perfume business had to stop. Her brush would feel his wrath. He snatched it and ran.

“Hey, give it back!” Mariam shouted.

Liam made it down the stairs and out the rear door before looking back. He reached the alder tree, certain Mariam would be right behind him, but instead she poked her head out the bathroom window on the second floor.

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“Liam! You’re going to make me late!”

“Mom said you can’t date until you’re sixteen. That’s the rules!” he said, pointing the brush at her.

“I’m *almost* sixteen!”

“Not until it’s your birthday!”

Mariam huffed in annoyance. “Liam, I’m not kidding. I want my brush back!”

He stuffed the brush in his pocket and ran at the tree. He leaped up to the knothole and sprang upward to grab the high branch, giving Mariam a proud grin.

“Oh, look, the shrimp can climb a tree!” Mariam said mockingly.

He looped his legs around the branch and pulled himself upright. “Well, this shrimp has your brush.”

Liam was about to cinch his victory by throwing the brush in the neighbor’s yard and telling his sister what he really thought of Eric and his stupid brother. But when Mariam came out of the house, his plans changed.

Mariam coughed, struggling to catch her breath. “Since when did such a wimpy kid like you figure out how to get up there?” she managed, gasping for air.

“Practice. It’s what happens when you go on too many dates with Eric,” Liam said, starting up to the next branch.

Mariam smirked. When the coughing fit passed, she lunged up the tree and grabbed his foot.

“Oh, no you don’t—gotcha!”

Caught between surprise and laughter, Liam jerked his foot free from her tenuous grip. He looked down. Something was wrong. One side of Mariam’s face was lifeless and drooped as

she struggled to cling to the branch.

“Mariam?”

His grin disappeared. Mariam fell backward and landed hard on the ground, limp as a rag doll.

* * *

Liam stared at the old rose bush—the memory played over and over like waves sweeping in from the sea. His mother had moved the rosebush from the front of the house and planted it in the exact spot where his sister had fallen and died one year ago.

His parents told him Mariam had suffered a stroke and died soon after she fell. This experience scarred Liam, causing him a great deal of anguish. Even though he’d been told countless times that he had nothing to do with her death, he feared they blamed him for what happened. After all, she wouldn’t have chased him if he hadn’t been so jealous.

He looked around. What was he doing in the back yard, anyway? He had become more absentminded lately, and his mind refused to take any responsibility for why he was standing next to Mariam’s rose bush. He headed back for the house and tripped on something nestled in the uncut grass—Grubb’s yellow, chewed-over dog dish. He suddenly remembered.

“Here, boy!” he called and whistled.

Grubb often hid in the bushes to surprise birds or squirrels that wandered into the yard. He was good at catching them, too. When it was his mealtime, though, he’d blow his cover and come running.

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Liam saw the back gate was wide open, and he sighed. “That’s just great.” He had only two responsibilities: his paper route, which he shared with his best friend Richard Sommers, and Grubb. Today, he got out of helping with the paper route because the nightmares had kept him up all night. Richard understood his nightmare and insomnia issues. Grubb was a more difficult responsibility to dismiss. The strong-willed dog required constant vigilance to keep him out of trouble.

The familiar jingle of Grubb’s collar caught his attention. He ran out of the back yard and found Grubb rooting around the Dickerson’s flower garden.

“How did you get that gate open? Come here, boy!”

Grubb looked up and his white fur-tipped tail flicked back and forth. His ears perked when a change in the wind kicked up a swirling of leaves and trash in the street. Along with the gust came the smell of the sea and something that made the hairs on his neck prickle: laughter. Infectious, familiar laughter. He couldn’t tell where it came from, but it sounded close.

“Mariam?” Liam called, feeling foolish for saying her name out loud. Of course it couldn’t be her, but something had caught Grubb’s interest, and he took off up the street. Liam chased after him, not even bothering to call after Grubb again; he didn’t listen anyway.

The laughter grew louder as Liam ran up Albatross Avenue. Huffing, he soon found himself in the older section of the neighborhood where the summer rental clapboard houses had a front-row view of the Pacific Ocean. Grubb stopped for a moment, sniffed, and then took off down a side trail.

Liam slid to a stop on the sand-covered sidewalk to catch

his breath. He hated running. It was so deceptive that a video game character could run all day and never get tired, but in real life, running felt like death.

A weedy beach access path lay between the homes but was cut off by a chain-link fence with a rusted sign that read *HERMIT COVE—NO TRESPASSING*. Grubb ran under the fence and disappeared over a sandy rise.



“Ah, man, don’t go down there!”

Liam stopped at the fence and listened for the laughter. All he heard was the rustle of beach grass and the distant roar of the surf. This whole situation was silly. He’d just been thinking about Mariam, and his imagination had filled in the rest. It was all Grubb’s fault.

Liam punched the no trespassing sign, grumbling. The sign glared back, daring him to challenge its authority. He considered heading home, thinking that Grubb could find his way back on his own. He’d run away before and always

returned. But his mother would be home early today, and she would ask about Grubb. She'd been on him for being too lax about taking care of his pet, but would she expect him to risk his life? He knew many of the Stonehelm Bluff trails were dangerous from when he and Mariam used to go on their adventure hikes together. If Grubb took one of those trails, he could get lost or hurt.

“Stupid dog,” Liam muttered, crawling under the fence. He jogged through the waist-high grass and stopped when he found Grubb sitting at a trailhead that led down a steep cliff to a narrowed section of beach where Hermit Cove was located.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Liam demanded.

The blast of a ship’s foghorn came from the sea, distracting Grubb. Liam dove for his willful pet and missed. For a wiener dog, Grubb was quick, and he got away.

Liam scanned the shimmering water for the ship but saw none. His daredevil pet sniffed his way down the trail, undeterred by the dizzying heights and gravel washouts. He made it some distance before he even bothered to look back.

Liam stood and dusted himself off. “I’m not going down there! Get back here right now!”

Grubb sat on the trail like a rock.

Mariam had always been a risk-taker, but even she hadn’t dared take the bluff’s steep trails. Could he do it now that he was older and had mastered climbing trees?

He began to climb down. The path narrowed to an arm’s length before plummeting down a sheer cliff. He was mistaken. Climbing a tree was nothing like standing over a sixty-foot drop.

Liam stopped at a section where the rock had sloughed off. Grubb somehow had managed over this part without difficulty, but Liam wasn't so confident. Using a tree root above as a handle, he stretched his foot out to test a rock outcropping. In doing so, he disturbed a large, hairy spider and it fell on his arm. His senses screamed to shake it off, but to panic would have been fatal. He looked down. Fear gripped him like a vice. If his mother saw him now, she'd ground him for a month.

The ship's horn blew again, much louder this time. He white-knuckled the roots as the sound rolled up the bluffs, sending a peppering of blackbirds to flight from the hemlocks below.

At that moment, all the troubles in Liam's life came in like a tidal wave. Since when were there ships blowing their horns this close to his home? He'd lived in the same house since he was born and had never heard anything so loud.

Then there were the nightmares. Since Mariam's death, his nightmares had grown steadily worse and more vivid. The night terror last night was one of the worst he ever had. In the dream, he was attacked by a giant shark that swallowed him whole. The months of poor sleeping were starting to add up.

Lastly, the memory of his sister's death filled his eyes with tears. Why did she have to die? A storm of self-pity washed over him. In this whirlwind of emotion, he stared at his clenched fists, and a serenity came. What if he let go? Would he see his sister again on the other side of death?

A jingling sound nearby sent this dark thought away. Grubb looked up at him from below.

“This is all your fault,” Liam sobbed.

Grubb looked back with his innocent golden eyes. When Liam reached for him, he ran off.

“Come back here!”

Anger swept over him. How dare Grubb put his life at risk with such indifference? Through bleary eyes, Liam leapt to the other side of the washout. He chased down the trail with blind disregard for the danger of the cliff. He gained speed as the path became steeper. Reaching the bottom, his feet slipped out from under him.

“Ah!” he cried, sliding down a washout of rock and earth. He stared into the cloudless sky for several moments, catching his breath. Around him, the treetops creaked in the constant Pacific winds. Seagulls and crashing waves were heard nearby.

Two crows fluttered down, landing on a dead branch above. The pair squawked as if they were laughing at him. He gave them brief notice and found it curious that one crow had a pink crown of feathers.

Liam stood and shook the dust from his unkempt brown hair. A flash of light caught his eye.

Was that lightning?

The wind died, and the sounds of the seagulls and crashing waves hushed to an eerie silence. His eyes widened when a torrential wall of fog came pouring between the trees from the cove, which soon enveloped him in an earthy-smelling gray cloud.

“Grubb?” Liam called timidly.

Another flash of light came, causing the fog to brighten, and then faded away.

Grasping through the trees, he reached a rocky embankment and climbed down. His feet sunk in the wet sand and he found himself standing in a tide pool of barnacle-covered stones. Two tall cragged rocks flanked the expanse of fog like sentinels guarding the cove.

The light flashed again, this time revealing the vague silhouette of something resting out on the water.

Liam took a few cautious steps forward until a wave of water washed over his feet. Squinting into the gray, his imagination played tricks on him. Was that a shadow darting to his left?

His senses buzzed with anticipation. At last, the fog thinned. Before him, a stone's throw away, was a grand ship resting on the water. Three masts speared the sky with a web of ropes that reached to the tops. Anchored, the vessel rocked gently on the water as it rose and fell in the quiet surf. Carved in ornate script along the swooping nose was the name *Miss Darby*.

Was it just a coincidence that this ship was like the one in his nightmare last night? He stepped back from the water. Though he was certain he wasn't in danger of a shark attack, this situation conjured up a deep sense of déjà vu.

"Hello!" he called. "Is someone there?"

All that reported back from the ship were the creaking timbers and the ding of the bell high above on the mainmast.

Another flash of light came. This time, he could just make out the shadow of a lighthouse out at sea. He didn't even know there was a lighthouse down here.

The two crows fluttered down and landed nearby, skittish

and uncertain. The crow with the pink crown of feathers had something shiny in its beak. It dropped it into a tide pool at Liam's feet.

Moments later, Grubb emerged from the fog, licking his chops. Noticing the crows, he rushed for the one with pink feathers, barking madly. The crows flapped frantically away, barely escaping Grubb's snapping bite and landed in the safety of the trees.

"Way to go, Grubb. You almost got that one," Liam said, petting his disappointed friend.

A blast of wind came from the direction of the shore, pushing the fog back out to sea. The crows squawked as they leapt from the tree and flew toward the ship.

Watching them fly over, Liam was stunned when the ship and the lighthouse suddenly shimmered away, revealing open sea. The crows banked, flapping for cover up the beach, and disappeared into the woods.

"Liam! What are you doing down here?"

"Mom!" Liam yelled, spinning around. His mother stood above him on the rocky embankment with her arms raised to the sky. Lowering her arms, she held her cellphone with the screen glowing an ominous red. She tapped at the phone and tucked it away.

"How long have you been down here?" she demanded. "What did you see?"

Liam blinked, trying to register that his mother was actually there. Lorna was seventy-two-years old and had difficulty with the stairs in their home. How she had managed that cliff was impossible for him to imagine.

“Did you come down from the bluffs?” Liam asked with a raised brow.

“Never mind that, I asked you a question.”

“There was a ship down here, like the kind from the pirate movies. It had the name *Miss Darby* on the front of it. It was right here just a moment ago, I swear!”

“Was that all you saw, then, a ship?”

He scanned the sea, scratching his head. “It was right in front of me on the water. What happened to it?”

“This is Hermit Cove. It’s a dangerous place where lots of junk floats in,” Lorna said as she paced about, looking around the rocks and crevasses.

“No, Mom, it wasn’t junk from the sea. It was a ship—a big fancy ship that looked new.”

Lorna disregarded Liam’s protest and continued looking around the cove.

“What are you looking for?”

“Never mind. Was there anything else you saw down here?”

“There were just a couple of crows. They—”

“Crows?” Lorna shot back, abruptly stopping her search.

Liam knelt over the tide pool. “They dropped something here in the water.”

He fished around until a glint caught his eye and pulled from the moss a gold chain with a disc attached at the end.

“Look at this . . . it’s Mariam’s locket!”



“Let me see.” Lorna climbed down the rock embankment without the slightest hint of difficulty. Taking the locket, she looked disappointed. “Did you notice where the crows went?” she asked nonchalantly.

“They flew off that way,” Liam said, pointing up the beach. “What do you think about the locket they gave me?”

Lorna examined the locket, looking skeptical. She removed her phone and took several pictures of the gold disc.

“What are you taking pictures for?”

She remained quiet as she thumbed through the photos. Curious, Liam looked over the images and was confused.

“Hey, it looks like a rock on your phone,” he said, taking back the locket.

Lorna tapped the screen, and the image cycled through a series of false colors. Finally, she said, “That’s because it *is* a rock. Why would you pretend it was her locket?”

Liam looked surprised. “It’s her locket, Mom, I’m sure of it. Look, it has the ‘M’ engraved on the outside.” Prying it open, he found the small colored photograph of himself from when he was in the fourth grade. “It even has my picture inside, see?”

Lorna let out a heavy sigh. “Liam, that isn’t funny.”

Liam watched with disbelief as she turned away and struggled back up the embankment.

“Mom, it’s Mariam’s locket! Why don’t you believe me?”

“Liam, I don’t know what happened down here, but one thing’s certain—what you’re holding is a rock, nothing more. I know it’s been hard for you since your sister died, but it’s time you accept it. Come along, we need to get home.”

He dangled the locket in front of Grubb’s nose and whispered, “Rock? I don’t care what she thinks. It’s her locket, isn’t it, boy?”

Grubb sniffed the locket, wagging his white-tipped tail. Liam stuffed it away and followed his mother.